



The Helping Hand

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"Komal, you are going to have a brother or a sister," said mamma.

"I want a sister," Komal said, and jumped up on to mamma's lap and gave her a kiss.

"It might turn out to be a brother," said papa.

"It might," agreed mamma.

"I want a brother, then," said Komal, and they all laughed.



Tarun was a quiet little boy. He didn't cry like other babies and he smiled a lot. Komal called him Tintin. She sat by his crib and played many games with him. She even taught him to count. Every evening she took his toes one by one between her fingers and said "One, two, three..." all the way up to ten.

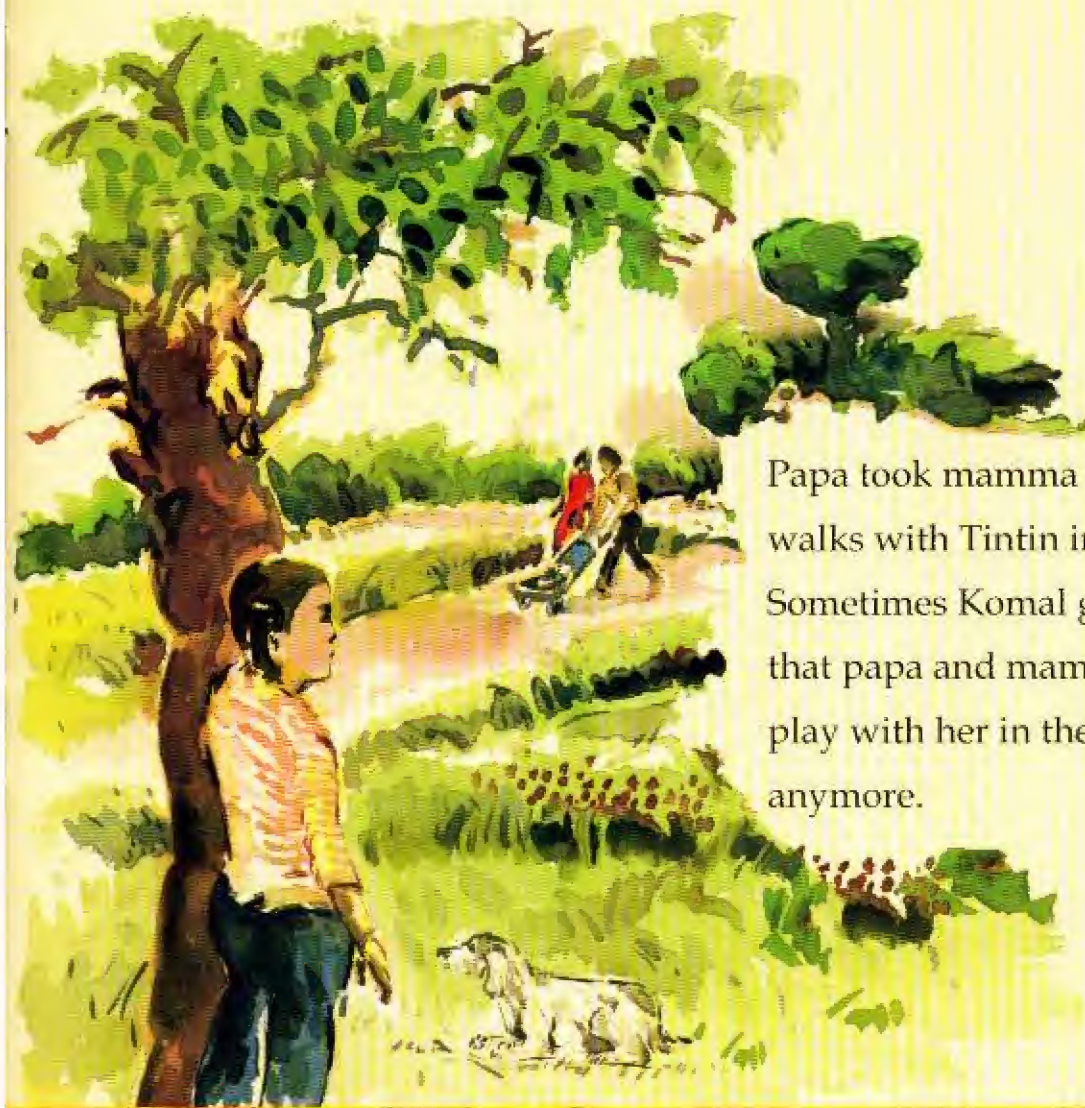
"Mamma, I am teaching Tintin to count," she liked to say. "He's going to be the smartest boy when he grows up."

"Let's first get him to be strong and healthy," mamma answered softly, without smiling.



Mamma and papa took Tintin to different doctors and different hospitals. They went to the doctor even when he didn't have a fever or a cough.

Sometimes mamma's eyes were red, as if she had been crying. Komal liked to sit in her lap at such times even though she was now eight.



Papa took mamma for long walks with Tintin in his pram. Sometimes Komal got angry that papa and mamma didn't play with her in the park anymore.



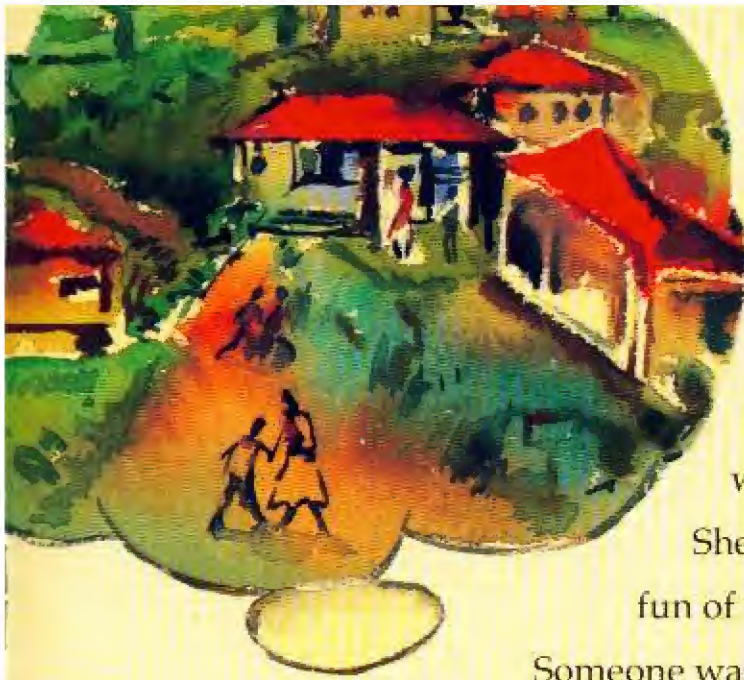
Tintin walked kind of funny and he drooled. He got all messy at the dinner table. Papa tried to teach him to be neat. But Tintin only got messier when he tried hard.

"Let Tarun be," mamma said at such times. "Let him learn at his pace."

"That's what my teacher says at school," Komal said. "He says we should learn at our own pace. But that's about maths and spelling and things like that."

"It's also about using the spoon and tying shoelaces and making your bed," papa said. "It is best to learn everything at your own pace."





When Tarun was ready to go to school, Komal wished he would go to her school. She wanted to take care of him.

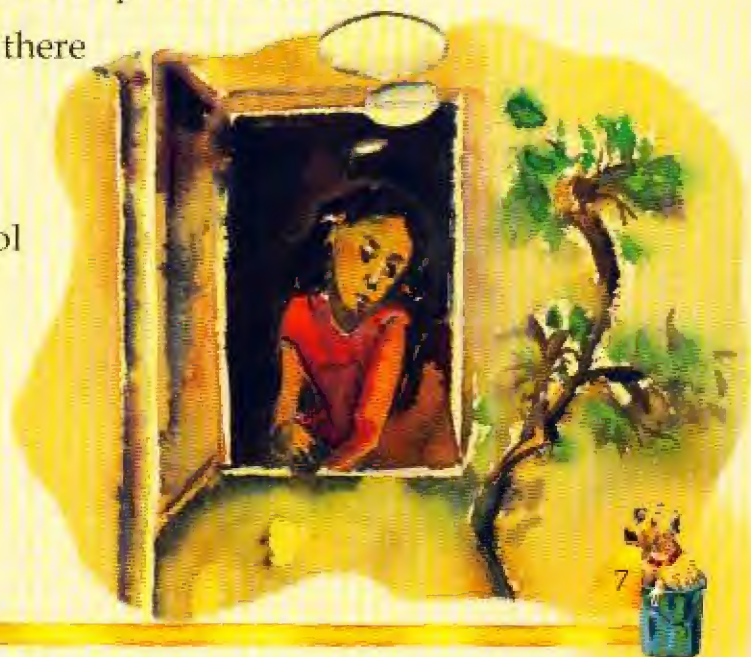
She knew how the children made fun of anyone who looked different.

Someone was "fatty" and someone else was "darkie". Children laughed at you for stammering and sometimes even for making a mistake in reading aloud. And, she knew well that her brother was different.

"We would like to send Tarun to a special school now.

In a year or two, his teachers there will tell us if he is ready for your school. Let's first see how he likes his special school with all the other special children, all right?"

papa said.





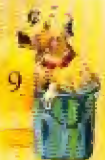
Tarun learned more drawing and less maths at his school. He did more games and less spelling. He didn't have any proper homework.

Komal didn't think that the special school was all that good. At thirteen, she knew what a school ought to be.

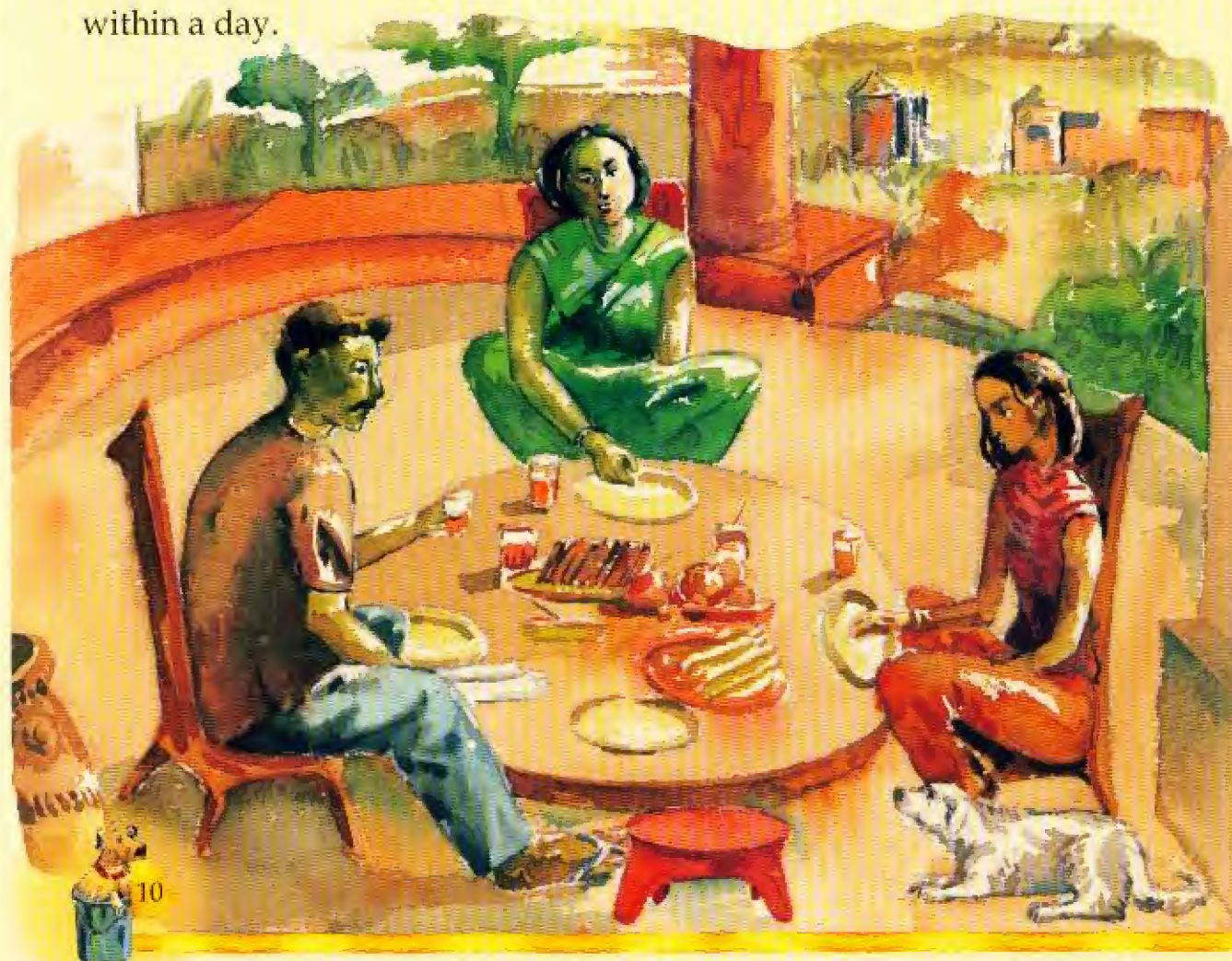


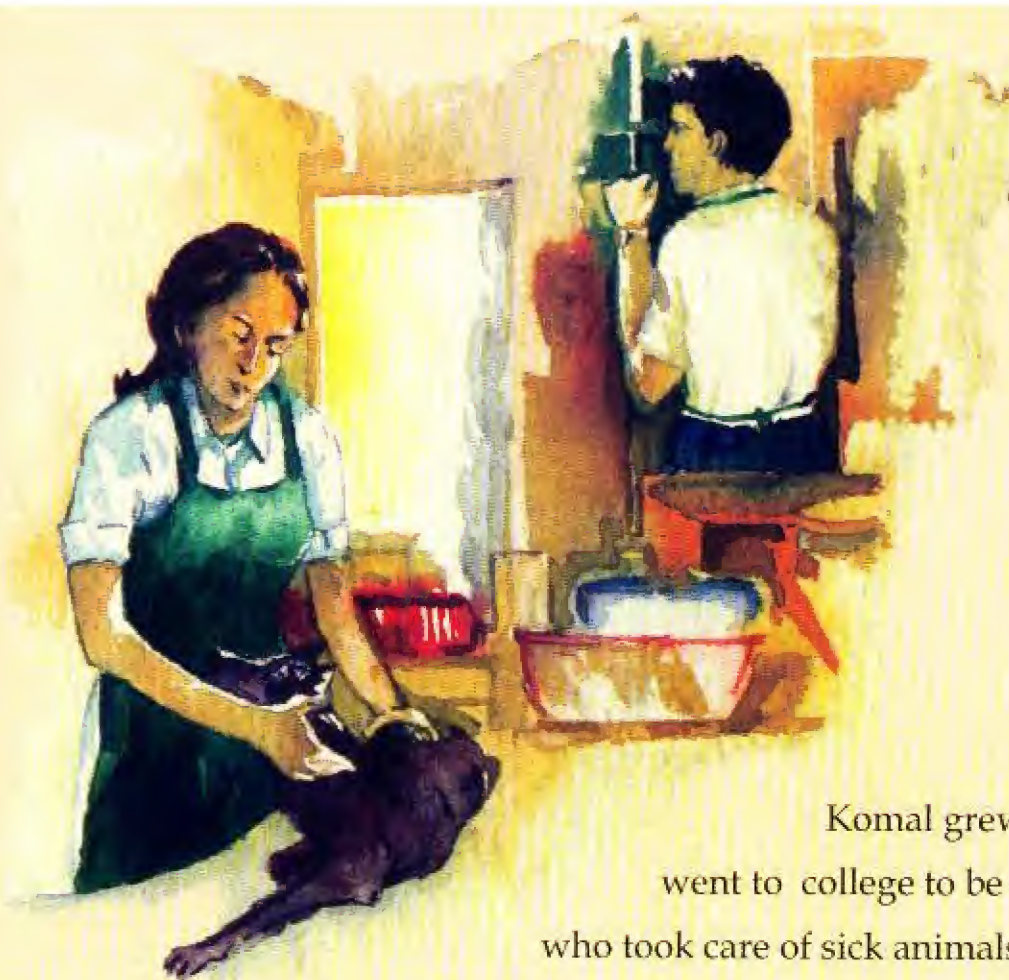


"Tarun's school is for children who are different," explained mamma. "Some learn to speak with their hands, and some to see with their ears. No one is less or more smart than anyone else, because every boy and every girl is good at one thing that only he or she can do."



As Komal grew older, she saw how busy life was around Tarun, especially for mamma and papa. They kept him clean, they kept his room neat, and they watched what he ate and when he slept. Sometimes they washed his sheets because he wet his bed. One day, Tarun left on a school trip for three days. Komal was happy and felt that all of them needed a bit of rest. But Komal slept fitfully because Tintin wasn't in the room with her. Mamma set an extra place at breakfast and papa said he missed him within a day.





Komal grew up and
went to college to be a doctor
who took care of sick animals. Tarun
stayed home when he finished special school
and learned to cook and use the washing machine.

He watered the plants and weeded the garden. He brushed the dog
and walked him in the park.

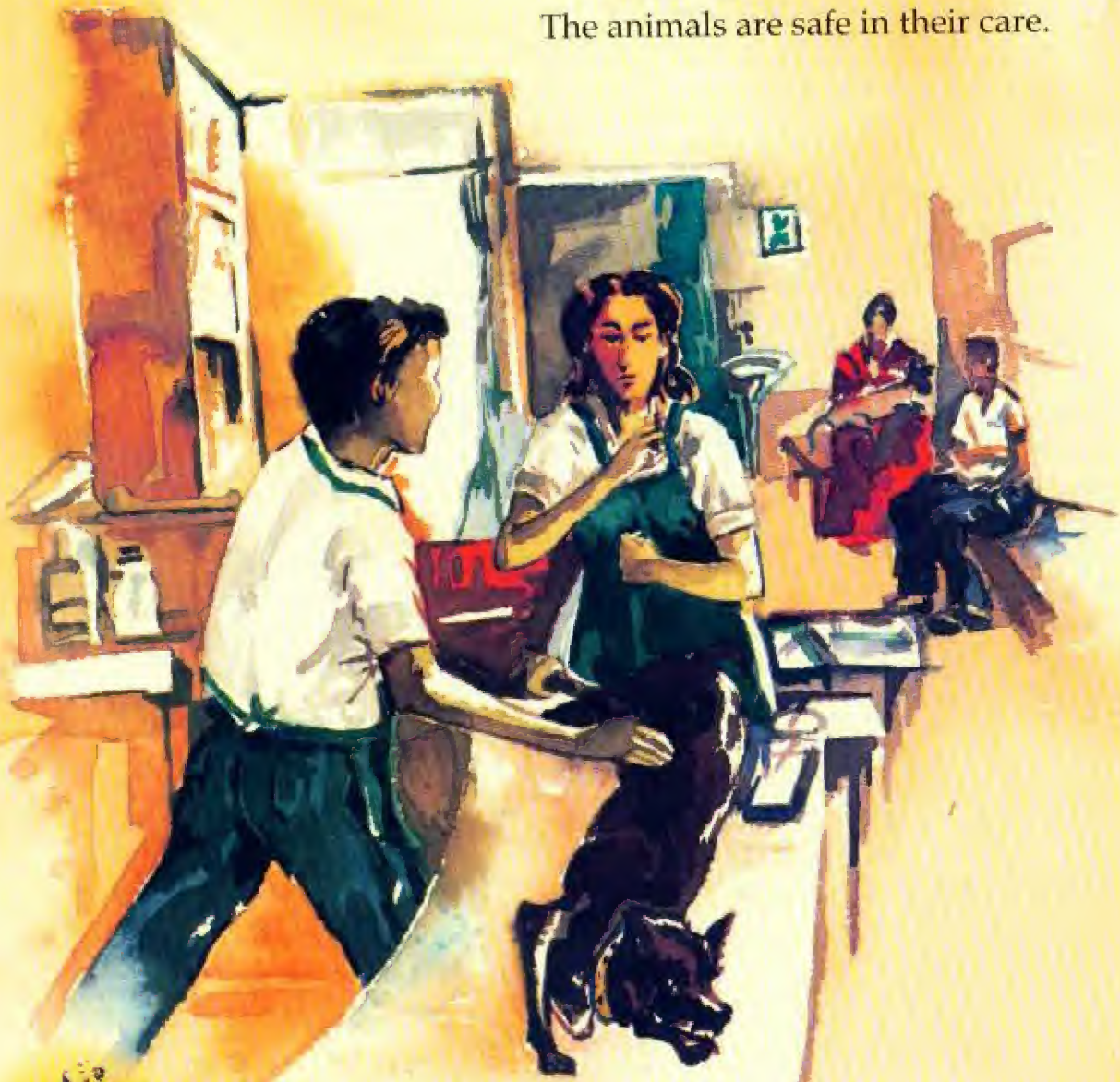
Komal set up a clinic where people brought dogs and cats and birds to
be cured. Anyone who had a pet became her friend. Every day she
had a little more work, and she needed a helping hand. She needed
someone to hold a frightened animal or bird that was in pain.

Can you guess who became her helper in the clinic?

You guessed right!



Komal and Tarun, doctor and assistant,
sister and brother are busy at work.
Komal is smart and kind. Tarun is
strong and gentle.
The animals are safe in their care.





*A **Spark Empathy Book** for children eight and above, **The Helping Hand** tells the story of a little girl Komal and her brother Tarun. Tarun is unlike other children: he needs help "to be strong and healthy". As Tarun grows older and goes to special school, learning at his own pace, Komal grows to understand, appreciate and cherish working with him. Differences, she learns, can be of many kinds – personal ability or feelings or choices. Tarun and Komal grow up into adults in a loving family, finding their individual strengths.*

***Kamakshi Balasubramanian** is an experienced educator who has lived, studied, and worked in India and abroad. She has taught language and writing to a variety of learners and currently teaches language, literature, and approaches to learning. Her stories for the young enjoy wide readership.*

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